

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME POEM

i.

She was surrounded by jonquils,
forsythia, a hedge of unclipped roses
-- purple red -- the color associated with greed.
A black dog hung at her side and on command
would offer his paw, devoted beyond
all human understanding.
Together they sat by the fish pond
and observed daily sky.

Her flowers, her dog, her tanned face
and flat belly could -- she knew --
be taken as signs of contentment.
This is why she painted over her mailbox,
clipped the telephone wires and was,
for five years, conveniently lost to everyone.
Other than that, she did nothing

for on her underside, tied
to the network was a man.
Not any man, but a man who suffered
from hay fever, who disliked the sun,
its heat, and her daily ritual of
snapping ticks from the dog's neck.

One by one she gathered them
between thumb and forefinger
until the collection spilled over
and their bloated bodies
rocked on useless legs.

At the moment she brought down her heel
and they split like overripened grapes,
emptying purple red, he screamed,
always he screamed,

and afterward, when she followed him inside,
telling him the dog was grateful,
the tick blood smeared onto the cool linoleum
leaving a trail.

For five summers this was
an undeniable fact of their everyday;
yet they continued.

ii.

In Mebane, you may remember,
there was a green yard with yellow flowers
and a black dog who loved me.

Every May third, Mr. Walker
mowed a path from the pear trees
to the fish pond, clearing the view.

After May third then,
for every one of those five seasons,
I had in addition to flower and animal,
the luxury of landscaping.

It was enough without a man
but he was there also
on the inside
in a shade-drawn bedroom, reading.

He did not speak when he read
but I heard the words,
so many words.

Every sundown, I stretched
the water hose from the pump house
to the flower garden.

I wore, like my grandmother Meads,
a billowing straw hat with red band.
At ninety, she is trying to leave a man
who died before she could.

When I tell this again,
I am determined to keep the connection
between my grandmother and myself

more ambiguous,
to establish our love
of gardening first.

Then the end will fall to jonquils,
a loving dog and scenery,
the more positive approach.

-- Kathy Meads

Brooklyn NY

A KNIGHT

A knight wakes one day with a giant smile on his face.
Which is odd since he's a serious fellow, even grave.
He tries and tries, but can't stop smiling.